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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 10 TOKYO 000408

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [OIIP](#) [KMDR](#) [KPAO](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [ECON](#) [ELAB](#) [JA](#)

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ARTICLES:

(1) Aso to visit Okinawa on March 7 for first time; to tour Futenma, Camp Schwab

RYUKYU SHIMPO (Page 1) (Full)
February 23, 2009

Prime Minister Taro Aso will visit Okinawa on March 7 for the first time since he assumed office. He is scheduled to visit the U.S. Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station, Camp Schwab, on which a Futenma replacement facility will be constructed, and other locations, according to informed sources. He will return to Tokyo the same day. He is also considering a visit to the site of an incident (that occurred last month) in Kohagura, Itoman City (in which a construction worker was seriously injured) from an exploding ordnance from the last war. Attention is being focused on what response the prime minister will make to Okinawa's request that the central government pay the full amount of the funds needed to hunt by private firms for unexploded bombs and shells that remain buried.

Aso is expected to meet with Okinawa Governor Hirokazu Nakaima. In their meeting, if realized, Aso and Nakaima will likely discuss the new Futenma relocation plan, in which the governor and the Nago mayor have called for moving the construction site further offshore, as well as the signed agreement on transferring U.S. Marines in Okinawa to Guam, which has met fierce opposition from local residents.

With an eye on the next House of Representatives election, Aso has energetically been making campaign tours. The planned visit to

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Okinawa is also aimed to boost public support for his administration.

Upon arriving in Okinawa on the morning of the 7th, Aso will visit the Foundation for Peace in Itoman. He then will go to Futenma Air Station and Camp Schwab. On the afternoon, he will attend a convention of the Women's Section of the Liberal Democratic Party's (LDP) Okinawa prefectural chapter at a hotel in Naha. Afterward, he is slated to meet with LDP lawmakers who have been elected or come from the prefecture.

Following the explosion in Itoman, Governor Nakaima called on Prime Minister Aso at his official residence on the 16th and asked him to establish a system to finance private work to hunt for unexploded bombs and shells, as well as to compensate victims of explosions. These requested measures are not included in the government's package of unexploded bomb-disposal measures. In response to this request, Aso reportedly just said: "I will look into it."

Regarding a government response to the request of the governor and the Nago mayor for reviewing the Futenma relocation plan, Aso said in January, "I cannot comment at the present stage". On the purpose of the realignment of U.S. forces in Japan, though, Aso replied in a House of Representatives Budget Committee meeting on the 19th, "The aim is to strengthen deterrence," taking a step forward from what he used to say.

In past prime ministerial visits to Okinawa, there were many cases in which solutions to pending issues or new measures were presented. Given this, attention is being focused on what remarks the prime minister will make on such issues as the disposal of unexploded bombs and U.S. military bases, including Futenma relocation.

(2) 15 mayors opposed to Guam pact

RYUKYU SHIMPO (Page 1) (Full)
February 22, 2009

The Ryukyu Shimpo conducted a questionnaire survey of the heads of Okinawa Prefecture's 41 municipalities on the agreement signed by the Japanese and U.S. governments to transfer U.S. Marines in Okinawa to Guam. There were answers from 39 municipal heads. Among them, 15 mayors (37 PERCENT) answered that they were opposed to the Guam relocation pact, with 11 mayors (27 PERCENT) saying they were

in favor of it. As seen from these figures, negative answers outnumbered affirmative ones. There were eight mayors (20 PERCENT) who responded to the survey but said they could not say whether they approved of the agreement or not. Meanwhile, the Japanese and U.S. governments also reconfirmed their course of action in their agreement signed this time to transfer Okinawa-based Marines to Guam, relocate the U.S. Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station, and return the sites of its military bases located south of Kadena Air Base in a package. Asked about this package implementation, 18 mayors (44 PERCENT) were opposed to it, with only 4 mayors (10 PERCENT) in favor. In the survey, a deep-seated feeling of rejection to the package implementation became clear again.

The questionnaire form was distributed to all municipalities on Feb. 17 when Foreign Minister Hirofumi Nakasone and U.S. Secretary of State Clinton signed the agreement. The deadline was Feb. 18. There were answers from 39 municipal heads by Feb. 20, and their answers were tabulated. There was no response from Onna Village's Mayor

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Fumiyasu Shikiya and Minamidaito Village's Mayor Kensho Nakada.

Most of the municipal heads who responded to the survey insisted that the Guam relocation itself should be pushed, regardless of whether they are in favor of the Guam relocation pact or not. Many of those affirmative about the Guam pact and those negative about it insisted that the government should continue listening to local views even though the pact was signed.

The municipal heads opposed to the Guam relocation pact, with the exception of one mayor, expressed their strong opposition to the Japan-U.S. bilateral agreement on the package implementation, with Okinawa City's Mayor Mitsuko Tomon stating that the greater part of Okinawa Prefecture's people are opposed to the package.

Those in favor of the Guam pact also clarified their opposition to the package implementation, with Tomigusuku City's Mayor Toyoaki Kinjo stating that the package is questionable. They are in favor of the signed agreement but remain doubtful of the package. There was also an opinion calling for the government to answer the requests of Okinawa Prefecture and Nago City over the planned relocation of Futenma airfield.

Five municipal heads, including Kadena Town's Mayor Tokujitsu Miyagi and Yaese Town's Mayor Shinkichi Nakamura, did not answer whether they are in favor of the Guam relocation pact or not.

The Guam pact reconfirmed the package incorporated in the roadmap for the realignment of U.S. forces in Japan. In this regard, most of those who did not clarify whether they are in favor of this reconfirmation or not were negative about the package. Kin Town's Mayor Tsuyoshi Gibu stated, "It is desirable to do immediately from where it is possible to lessen the burden."

Nago City's Mayor Yoshikazu Shimabukuro, whose city is where Futenma airfield's heliport functions will be relocated, and Higashi Village's Mayor Seikyu Iju did not clarify whether they are in favor of the Guam pact and the package, saying local governments are not in a position to evaluate.

(3) Japan's anti-piracy bill to allow destroyers to fire at pirate ships and protect foreign vessels

YOMIURI (Top play) (Abridged slightly)
February 22, 2009

The outline of the bill on measures to counter piracy, which the government is planning to submit to the Diet in early March, was revealed on Feb. 21. The legislation includes a provision allowing (the MSDF) to fire at pirate ships to stop acts of piracy. The legislation is also designed to give (the MSDF) greater authority to use weapons than in the maritime policing action provision of the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) Law and to make it mandatory to report to the Diet any dispatch of SDF personnel.

Based on the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, the bill defines

piracy as "all illegal acts of violence, detention or looting committed for private gain by the crew of a private ship or aircraft."

In line with that definition, the legislation is designed to: (1) expand the scope of protection, which is now limited to

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Japan-related vessels under the current maritime policing action provision, to include all vessels, (2) task the Japan Coast Guard (JCG) and the SDF with tackling piracy, with the SDF being called upon when the JCG cannot handle the task, (3) let the SDF stop piracy and the JCG clamp down on pirates, such as arresting them, (4) apply Article 7 of the Police Duties Execution Law to the use of weapons, (5) add firing at a pirate ship to stop piracy to a set of requirements for firing at the other party to inflict harm, and (6) require an SDF dispatch implementation plan to be reported to the Diet.

The government is also considering imposing either the death penalty or life imprisonment as the punishment for hijacking a ship that results in death.

In order to relax conditions surrounding the use of weapons against pirates, the bill incorporates a provision that applies Article 7 of the Execution of Police Duties Law, which currently allows police officers to use weapons in cases of self-defense or during emergency evacuations.

It clearly states that the MSDF can fire directly at a pirate ship.

For instance, if a pirate ship defies an order to stop moving toward a civilian ship, the MSDF can fire on the pirates if there are no other means of stopping the vessel, even if the situation does not constitute an act of self-defense.

In a case when an act of piracy occurs in Japanese territorial waters, it is possible to fire at pirates during maritime policing activities by invoking the JCG Law. But in foreign seas, such as waters off Somalia and the Strait of Malacca, the use of weaponry is restricted, prompting the government to try to use the bill to expand the law to cover a broader range of circumstances in which the authorized use of weapons is permissible.

When the government decides to dispatch its vessels, the bill requires that it submit to the Diet a report on its implementation program. Some within the government were keen to require that the government seek a Diet vote to sanction a dispatch of SDF personnel.

The government plans to issue an order by early March to send two MSDF vessels to engage in maritime policing activities in waters off Somalia. After the new law is implemented, the government will shift its legal basis for MSDF activities to allow operations under the new law, aiming to continue its work in the area without interruption.

(4) Barrier to U.S. entry into Japanese government's procurement:
U.S. calls for reform at WTO

NIKKEI (Page 5) (Full)
February 23, 2009

The U.S. at a meeting of the World Trade Organization (WTO) Trade Policy Review Body on the Trade Policy Review of Japan, held on February 18 and 20, called on Japan to reform its bidding system, noting that it is very difficult for foreign companies to break into the Japanese government's procurement market.

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The U.S. has been criticized by various countries, including Japan, for the inclusion in its economic stimulus package of a "Buy

American" clause, which mandates the use of U.S.-made products in public works. It has expressed dissatisfaction with Japan's trade policy, ignoring its own policy.

The trade policy review, which is held every two years, is a forum for member nations to confer on problems of Japan's trade policy, based on WTO reports.

The U.S. pointed out that there are various impediments in the Japanese government's procurement system, and that it lacks transparency. Expressing concern that the penetration of foreign companies into such a market remains very low, the U.S. referred to the strict requirements that had to be met in order for foreign companies to be able to take part in bidding. It also pointed out the many irregularities and discretionary contracts in the system.

In addition to government procurement, the U.S. also called for reform of the inspection system Japan applies to imported beef, noting that it is a non-scientific method that is not in compliance with international guidelines. Pointing out Japan's high tariffs on agricultural products as a whole, one U.S. delegate said that the U.S. was disappointed at Japan's stance toward the agricultural area in the multilateral trade liberalization talks (Doha Round).

However, the US urged Japan's cooperation, with one delegate saying, "We expect Japan to press ahead with structural reforms and market opening in order to help the global economy grow."

(5) U.S. special envoy: Reduction of greenhouse gases 25-40 PERCENT , as advocated by Europe as a mid-term target is impractical

NIKKEI (Page 5) (Full)
February 21, 2009

It has been learned that U.S. Special Envoy for Climate Change Todd Stern, who is responsible for negotiations on global warming for the United States, told Environment Minister Tetsuo Saito that attainment of the mid-term goal for reducing greenhouse-gas emissions being advocated by Europe, China and India is "impractical." Since there are many parts of Stern's statement that Japan agrees with, the government is hurrying to erect a framework for cooperation.

During their summit meeting in Washington on Feb. 24, it is expected that Prime Minister Aso and President Obama will agree on a policy course of bilaterally cooperating under the post-Kyoto Protocol international framework to deal with global warming after 2013. Coordination is underway to establish a new consultative venue at the working level for discussing such global-scale challenges as global warming, the world economy, and aid to Africa.

Special Envoy Stern, during his meeting with Environment Minister Stern on Feb. 17, expressed his view that reaching the target set for advanced countries to reduce by the year 2020 greenhouse-gas emissions by 25 to 40 PERCENT , based on the year 1990, was impractical. "For the U.S. to realize this goal will require much greater efforts, compared to the EU," he said. President Obama has made a public commitment to constrain domestic emission amounts by 2020 to the level they had been in 1990. He stressed that the EU's ambitious target would require different (reduction) efforts by

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Europe.

Stern also hinted at the possibility of revising the standards for comparing emissions reductions. He stated, "I do not think there is need to set only 1990 as the standard year." He continued: "It is conceivable to make it a more recent year such as 2005 or 2007." Although under the Kyoto Protocol, the standard year was 1990, Japan at that time had made progress in conserving energy, and complained about the fairness of the date. It has been urging a reconsideration of the standard year for the post-Kyoto regime. The Environment Ministry has not released the details of the meeting between Minister Saito and Special Envoy Stern.

This was the first time for a high-level official to explain the

U.S. government's position since the launching of the Obama administration. It is expected that at the Japan-U.S. summit meeting on the 24th, there will be agreement to strengthen cooperation in the environment and energy areas, such as post-Kyoto negotiations and development of renewable energy sources. In tandem with the Prime Minister, working-level officials will enter into specific talks with Stern and other officials.

(6) Asahi Shimbun concludes there is no truth in Shimamura's Shukan Shincho claim that he had attacked newspaper head office

ASAHI (Page 1) (Abridged slightly)
February 23, 2009

The weekly magazine Shukan Shincho has run since late January a series of four articles with notes by Masanori Shimamura, 65, who claims to have attacked the Asahi Shimbun's Hanshin bureau in 1987, killing one reporter and wounding another.

The Asahi Shimbun interviewed Shimamura in 2006. The newspaper has concluded from examining the Shimamura interview and the data it had obtained from its news-gathering activities that there was no truth in Shimamura's notes that contained many points that conflicted with the facts. Investigative authorities, including the National Police Agency (NPA), think that what Shimamura confessed to is untrustworthy and that there is no possibility that he was involved in the incident.

According to the Shukan Shincho's articles, Shimamura was asked by an official (then) at the U.S. Embassy in Japan to attack the Asahi Shimbun and that besides its Hanshin bureau, he attacked the newspaper's Tokyo head office in January 1987, its dormitory in Nagoya in September 1987, and attempted to bomb its Shizuoka bureau in March 1988.

When Shimamura was imprisoned in a separate case, he sent more than 10 letters to the Asahi Shimbun from April 2005 through September 2006, saying he was the attacker in the 1980s. In May 2006, two Asahi Shimbun reporters interviewed Shimamura in prison. However, his statements to the reporters contradicted the facts established in the Hanshin shooting, including the clothes worn by the attacker, the scene at the office and the weapons used. Contradictions also appeared in his motive and other factors in the Shukan Shincho articles.

The NPA instructed Hyogo prefectural police to check the contents of the Shukan Shincho articles. "We cannot ignore these stories because the attack was a major incident that shook society," an NPA official

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said. The NPA also found that Shimamura's words deviated from the facts of the case. In addition, he included many doubtful points about his personal life and career.

The Asahi Shimbun phoned Shimamura on Feb. 22 for an interview, but he told the newspaper that the request should be made through Shukan Shincho.

(7) TOP HEADLINES

Asahi:
Organization headed by lawmaker Iwaki found unaccounted expenses amounting to 340 million yen

Mainichi:
Poll: Public support for Aso cabinet at 11 PERCENT , with 39 PERCENT calling for immediate resignation

Yomiuri & Tokyo Shimbun:
ASEAN plus 3 agrees to set up institute to monitor economic conditions

Nikkei:
Metal, chemical firms to slow output reduction

Sankei:

Domestic pharmaceutical firms expect to place new drugs for influenza on market in 2010 or 2011, at earliest

Akahata:

Rallies held across nation calling for protecting employment

(8) EDITORIALS

Asahi:

(1) Personal information leak should be punished not with penalty but with compensation

(2) Bridge construction in Tomonoura should be reconsidered in view of landscape

Mainichi:

(1) People calling for Prime Minister Aso to quickly step down

(2) U.S. should present blueprint for success through dispatching more troops to Afghanistan

Yomiuri:

(1) Detailed preparations and studies needed for lay judge system

Nikkei:

(1) Introduce citizen-numbering system to disseminate electronic tax filing

(2) Financial and economic crisis becoming more serious

Sankei:

(1) Ministries' measures to review clinical training improper to produce good doctors

(2) We expect Obama administration to come up with sensible strategy, instead of relying only on military power

Tokyo Shimbun:

(1) Steadily speed up resuming operations of Kashiwazaki-Kariwa Nuclear Power Station

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(2) Trial for Pol Pot: Continuing personal contributions imperative

Akahata:

(1) Disposal of unexploded shells: Don't continue evading responsibility

(9) Prime Minister's schedule, February 21

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Full)

February 22, 2009

09:58

Took a walk around his official residence.

17:00

Received a call from Australian Prime Minister Rudd.

Prime Minister's schedule, February 22

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Full)

February 23, 2009

07:24

Took a walk around his official residence.

10:15

Departed from Haneda Airport on JAL 1203 accompanied by LDP Secretary General Hosoda and Policy Research Council Chairman Hori.

11:17

Arrived at Aomori Airport.

12:02

Met at an Aomori hotel with Diet Affairs Committee Chairman Oshima, followed by Aomori Gov. Mimura. Afterward met with former Private Kindergarten Association of Japan President Miura, followed by LDP Tax System Research Commission Chairman Tsushima.

12:43

Attended an LDP Aomori economic seminar, followed by a meeting.

14:13

Met at Aomori Airport with Oshima, LDP Aomori Chapter Secretary General Yamauchi and Policy Research Council Chairman Nagao.

14:48

Departed from Aomori Airport on JAL 1206.

15:51

Arrived at Haneda Airport.

16:25

Had a haircut at a barber in the Hotel Pacific in Takanawa.

17:59

Met at his official residence with Vice Foreign Minister Yabunaka, North American Affairs Bureau Director General Umemoto, and Assistant Chief Cabinet Secretary Hayashi.

(Corrected copy): Tensions between China and neighbors emerging over sovereignty of Senkaku, Spratly islands with China taking tougher

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stance

NIKKEI (Page 6) (Full)
February 20, 2009

Tensions are emerging between China and its neighbors over the sovereignty of the Senkaku Islands (called the Diaoyutai Islands in Chinese) and the Spratly Islands, since China has toughened its stance. Late last year, Chinese oceanographic research vessels intruded into Japanese waters surrounding the Senkaku Islands, but China, in reaction to Japan's increased security in the waters in the wake of the invasion case, lodged a protest against Japan. China also filed a complaint against the Philippines for its adoption of a law that recognizes the Spratly Islands as its territory. It seems that an increasing number of Chinese people, with the ongoing economic recession in mind, are calling on their government to take hard-line stands toward foreign countries.

In an executive meeting in Beijing on Feb. 16, Sun Zhi-hui, administrator of the State oceanic Administration, referred to the case of intrusion of two oceanographic research vessels possessed by the administration into the Japanese waters near the Senkaku Islands last December. He then revealed that the intrusion was intended to demonstrate that China has the right of ownership.

Sun said: "Our vessels navigated all the oceanic areas over which China holds sovereignty," emphasizing that China has stepped up warning and surveillance in the East China Sea, South China Sea, and other waters. He also said that China dispatched a total of about 200 ships and 140 planes to these areas over the past year.

Set off by the invasion case, the Japanese government has strengthened security in the waters surrounding the Senkaku Islands. The Japan Coast Guard reportedly has deployed patrol ships carrying helicopters in the surrounding sea areas on a regular basis. A responsible official of the Chinese Foreign Ministry's Asian Affairs Bureau called in a Japanese embassy staff member in Beijing on Feb. 10 and told him: "If Japan moves more aggressively, China will have to take harsh response measures."

On Feb. 17, the Philippine Congress passed a law that specifies Huang Yan Island and some Spratly islands as its territories. In reaction, the Chinese Foreign Ministry issued a statement on the 18th reading: "China has ownership of Huang Yan Island, Spratly, and other oceanic areas. Other countries' claims to these areas are invalid." Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Wang Kuang Ya summoned the acting head of the Philippine Embassy and conveyed a stiff protest.

Such a resolute posture of the Chinese government reflects a flood of hard-line views posted on the Internet. The Chinese people, given

the current economic recession, tend to fall into an introverted way of thinking. The Chinese Foreign Ministry cannot ignore such messages as: "Don't show a weak posture"; and, "We demand that the Chinese government take substantial action."

China has settled onshore borderline issues with its neighboring countries one after another. But the nation remains unable to find solutions regarding oceanic territorial issues that involve national interests, such as seabed oil and gas fields. Some observers speculate that the military, which has enhanced its operational capability in the East China Sea, may be gaining more influence.

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ZUMWALT